

## Steffano Café 9

Words Gary Inman Photography Jim Gianbia

This is the Café 9. It costs the same as the Desmosedici but trounces it in the beauty stakes



**T**his is the bike Bob built. I've never met Bob, only spoken to him on a crackly line from his Northern California workshop at one in the morning, but I know I like him. Bob is Robert Steffano. Bob is rock and roll. He's the Keith Richards of bike modification. Bob has a cool and easy confidence born from doing this stuff for a long time. He can fire out dialogue that would make other builders sound like rope-smoking kooks and instead makes me nod my head and gurgle with, 'You're so right' appreciation like a college student making goo-goo eyes at the dishing new lecturer. And Bob's built the kind of bikes people who live off the interest in their bank accounts buy to add to their collections.

He describes this machine, the Ducati 999-based Café 9, as, 'A collision of tradition and modern technology,' then adds in textbook Californian speak, 'Like the world we live in, right?' He's The Big Lebowski's Dude for the Ducati Corse crowd. 'I love the culture of motorcycling,' he says. 'All the Ace Café and 59 Club stuff. This is my idea of a modern café racer. I see café racers as *the* real world motorcycle.'

Look at the Café 9 and it's clear Bob is big on curves. He's tactile. A Taurus, I'm betting. 'Curves work on motorcycles, like they work on women,' says Bob. Amen says PB. 'People want to touch these bikes. Especially women. I'm into that,' adds Bob. The most go-ahead-stroke-me element is the stingray-skin seat. 'I've woven nature into the technology,' says Bob, delivering another perfectly weighted soundbite while I kick myself that my own Frankenstein's Monster of a Guzzi café racer's one-off seat is covered in marine vinyl, not the skin of a Steve Irwin slayer.

But Bob is keen to admit he doesn't do everything himself. Just like Keef needs Mick and, you know, Charlie and Xanax and the others. Bob sees his strength as his ability to collaborate with a group of craftsmen he trusts and to incorporate their ideas. His main ally is metal pounder Evan Wilcox. Bob and Evan made the organically-shaped exhaust resonator a reality. Formed from beaten sheet alloy, it differs from traditional end cans in that the exhaust pulses bounce off each other within the tuneable resonator to emit a sound, 'A bit like a V12 Ferrari. Loud but refined. Not like normal open pipes. Not barky.'

Bob is building Café 9s to order. Two buyers are in talks with the Café 9's creator, both willing to pay the same \$75,000 Ducatis are asking for their road-going Desmosedici. What they'll get is carbon fibre bodywork, PVM forged wheels, uprated Brembos and a myriad of craftsman created doo-dads, all attached to a bike that can still be serviced by any Ducati dealer. ☐

1 hand-beaten alloy can

1 Ducati 999

1 stingray-skin seat

